DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 154 259 CG 012 408

AUTHOR Roosa, Mark W.
TITLE Mate Selection: A Propositional Formulation.
PUB DATE [74]
NOTE 18p.

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.83 HC-$1.67 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Behavior Patterns; Developmental Stages; *Marriage; *Mate Selection; Psychological Characteristics; Research Needs; *Social Exchange Theory; Social Influences; *Sociocultural Patterns; State of the Art Reviews

ABSTRACT

With the intent of integrating partial theories that have developed in the area of mate selection, this paper presents propositions extracted from the research literature (1950-1976). A logical ordering of these propositions is suggested and new propositions are derived by interrelating selected propositions. These conclusions are reached: first, the propositions from exchange theory can be used to explain all the others mentioned in the paper; second, a stage theory of mate selection has considerable support in the literature and may prove to be a valuable research area. (Author)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED154259

MATE SELECTION: A PROPOSITIONAL FORMULATION

Mark W. Roosa*

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

M.W. Roosa

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC) AND USERS OF THE ERIC SYSTEM."

U S DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION

THIS DOCUMENT HAS BEEN REPRODUCED EXACTLY AS RECEIVED FROM THE PERSON OR ORGANIZATION ORIGINATING IT. POINTS OF VIEW OR OPINIONS STATED DO NOT NECESSARILY REPRESENT OFFICIAL NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION POSITION OR POLICY

*Department of Family Ecology, Michigan State University, East Lansing, Michigan 48824

CG 012408

ABSTRACT

MATE SELECTION: A PROPOSITIONAL FORMULATION

In an attempt to integrate the partial theories that have developed in the area of mate selection, propositions were extracted from the research literature (1950-1976). A logical ordering of these propositions is suggested and new propositions are derived by interrelating selected propositions. These conclusions are reached: (1) the propositions from exchange theory can be used to explain all the others mentioned in the paper; (2) a stage theory of mate selection has considerable support in the literature and may prove to be a valuable research area.

The objective of this paper is to interrelate propositions from the research literature and the various partial theories of mate selection and to integrate these propositions into a more complete theory. Some previous attempts have been made to construct theories or partial theories of mate selection (e.g., Murstein's stimulus-value-role theory of mate selection (1970), Winch's complementary needs theory (1967)). However, most of these attempts have

maintained a rather narrow focus and little attempt has been made to integrate these various partial theories (Burr (1973) is an exception).

In their decade review of the literature in mate selection, Moss, et al. (1971), concluded "we have not moved very far in handling the issues appearing at the beginning of the decade." If the present review is an indication, even less research is being done on these issues in the 70s. This is unfortunate because of the possible applicability of a theory of mate selection to such current problems as the high incidence of teenage pregnancy and high divorce rates. However, a large body of literature does exist and this provides a substantial foundation for theory building. Hopefully the approach taken in this paper will stimulate others to test these propositions and to research some of the areas that still need development.

Probably the largest body of research in mate selection exists in the general area of homogamy. Though this is often broken into components labeled normative theory, interractional theory, balance theory and exchange theory, the attempt will be made to interrelate the propositions from these theories. The propositions which follow have been extracted from the available research in these and other areas. No attempt will be made to define the variables used or to discuss questions of measurement. Those who are interested in these issues should consult the original article.

Propositions of Mate Selection

There are several indications that norms play a significant role in the mate selection process.

1. The existence of norms about mate selection influences mate selection so that it tends to conform to these normative definitions (Burr, 1973).

   Burchinal extends the importance of this statement.

2. Norm acceptance is influenced by the saliency of norms in one's reference group and this is a direct, positive relationship (Burchinal, 1960).

By integrating propositions 1 and 2, the following can be derived:

D-1. The saliency of the norms regarding mate selection in one's reference group is related to the amount of influence in proposition 1 and this is a positive relationship.

Katz and Hill offer a method of measuring the amount of influence of certain reference groups:

3. The degree to which cultural groups are residentially segregated influences the importance of behavior conforming to norms and this is a positive relationship (Katz & Hill, 1958; Thomas, 1951).

By combining propositions 1 and 3, the following propostion can be derived:

D-2. The degree of cultural segregation influences the saliency of norms about mate selection, and this is a positive relationship.

Finally, Burr indicates some of the characteristics about which norms are held:

4. The existence of norms against racial (religious, ethnic, socio-economic status, education and age) heterogamy influences the amount of racial (etc.) heterogamy and this is a positive relationship (Burr, 1973).

By combining proposition 4 with propositions D-1 and D-2, the following are derived:

D-3. The saliency of the norms regarding racial (etc.) heterogamy in one's reference group influences the amount of racial (etc.) heterogamy and this is a positive relationship.

D-4. The degree of cultural segregation influences the probability of homogamous mate selection and this is a positive relationship.

Thus far, these propositions suggest that marital choice tends to be homogamous with regard to certain socio-cultural characteristics. However, two important points have been overlooked so far: (1) The hierarchy of these socio-cultural characteristics in terms of their importance to marital homogamy; (2) Variables that explain deviations from the norms about homogamy, in general, or from the

hierarchy of the socio-cultural characteristics, specifically. Other than mentioning that norms about racial homogamy are the most basic, and therefore highest in the hierarchy, and that norms about religious homogamy are next, little else is mentioned about a norm hierarchy. This is one of the areas in which a great deal of research remains to be done.

The following propositions do attempt to explain some variations from normative patterns.

5. The distance from the family of orientation at which mate selection takes place influences the degree of homogamy in mate selection and this is an inverse relationship (Leslie & Richardson, 1965; Coombs, 1962).
6. The degree of individualism influences the degree of homogamy in mate selection and this is an inverse relationship (Thomas, 1951).
7. Age influences the degree of homogamy in religion, education, and class in mate selection and this is a positive relationship (Kerckhoff, 1964).
8. Age influences the degree of homogamy in urbanity in mate selection and this is an inverse relationship (Kerckhoff, 1964).
9. The religious homogamy of the parent's marriage influences the probability of homogamy in the children's marriage (Thomas, 1951).

Though no other research was found that used the homogamy of the parent's marriage as a dependent variable, it seems logical that this variable could also affect the probability of homogamy with respect to several other socio-cultural characteristics in the children's marriages. It also seems that propositions 5 and 9 could be explained by referring to propostion D-1. When one leaves the family of orientation, one changes reference groups. As one ages, one often changes reference groups, or the norms or norm hierarchy of one's reference groups change (which is a process equivalent to changing reference groups). Thus, one could generalize to obtain:

D-5. Changes in membership groups (reference groups) influence the degree of homogamy in mate selection in the direction indicated by the norms of the new reference group.

The following proposition relates birth-order to homogamy in mate selection:

10. Birth order is associated with the degree of socialization and this is an inverse relationship (MacDonald, 1967).

Since the degree of socialization is a measure of the degree of conformity to societal norms, proposition 10 can be combined with proposition 1 to yield:

D-6. Birth order is associated with the degree to which norms concerning mate selection affect the choice of a mate and this is an inverse relationship.

Following logically from this, the findings of Ward yield:

11. There is a relationship between the similarity of birth order and the probability of mate selection and this is a positive relationship (Ward et al., 1974).

This suggests that first borns not only seek persons who are like themselves on socio-cultural characteristics but also who share similar degrees of socialization and norm adherence. Heterogamy increases as one goes up the birth order.

Next are a series of propositions related to homogamy that are generally found under the heading of propinquity. These propositions are from Katz and Hill's norm-interaction-time-cost theory of mate selection:

12. Within the normative field of eligibles, the probability of mate selection varies directly with the probability of interaction (Katz & Hill, 1958).
13. The amount of courtship interaction influences the probability of marital choice and this is a positive relationship (Katz & Hill, 1958).
14. The probability of interaction is proportional to the ratio of the opportunities at a given distance over the intervening distance (Katz & Hill, 1958).
15. The amount of potential interaction is inversely related to a time-cost function (Katz & Hill, 1958).
16. The time cost function is directly related to distance (Katz & Hill, 1958).

Combining propositions 12 to 16 with the earlier variable, degree of cultural segregation, we can derive:

D-7. The degree of cultural segregation influences the probability of interaction with homogamous persons and this is a positive relationship.

Similarly:

D-8. The probability that two people are homogamous is inversely influenced by the distance between them and positively influenced by the degree of cultural segregation.

Thus far in this formulation, the propositions have dealt with the influence of norms, membership groups and distance on homogamy in mate selection. Edwards has developed yet another explanation for homogamy:

17. The amount of perceived rewards influences mate selection and this is a positive relationship (Edwards, 1969).

18. Similarity of resources is related to the degree of equality in reward satisfaction and this is a positive relationship (Edwards, 1969).

19. Similarity of resources is related to the probability of homogamy of other characteristics and this is a positive relationship (Edwards, 1969).

Thus, the reward/cost function influences the probability of interaction (14 to 16) and the perceived quality of the interaction (17). In turn, the perceived quality of the interaction is enhanced by homogamy with

respect to resources and, probably, other socio-cultural characteristics (18 and 19).

Finally, some psychologists have turned from external or socio-cultural homogamy to internal homogamy:

20. The degree of similarity in self-adjustment (social adjustment and I.Q.) influences the probability of mate selection and this is a positive relationship (Snyder, 1966).
21. The degree of similarity in the level of self-acceptance (hierarchy of values concerning marriage, mental heatlh, level of neuroticism, and sexual drive level) influences the probability of mate selection and this is a positive relationship (Murstein, 1970).
22. The degree of perceived complementarity of marriage roles influences the probability of mate selection and this is a positive relationship (Murstein, 1970).

Propositions 20 and 21 are suggested, or can be explained by propositions 17, 18, and 19. Proposition 22 is related to Winch's needs complementarity theory which has been avoided here. Several persons have explored complementarity, usually with negative results (Bowerman, et al., 1956; Trost, 1967a, 1967b; Udry, 1963). Part of this failure may be due to the vagueness of the terms used i.e., needs, traits. However, it seems logical that in marriage or mate choice, an important criteria would be role "fit." This could also be stated as sharing "homogamous norms

concerning marital roles." Though support for this proposition is weak at this point, it will be included in the formulation because of its apparent logical relationship.

Discussion

Now that these propositions have been presented and some new propositions generated to establish some of the interrelationships, what are the implications for a theory of mate selection? There are two.

First, it seems possible to explain almost all of the preceding propositions in terms of exchange theory. The existence of norms about behavior suggest that there is a cost for violating those norms. There are certain factors that influence the relative cost of such violations, i.e., distance from home, norms that suggest that heterogamous marriage is better than no marriage. The existence of norms also suggest that there are rewards associated with conformity to norms. Once the reward/cost function associated with socio-cultural characteristics has been settled, one attempts to maximize the profits from the relationship itself. Thus, it seems possible that Edward's propositions from social exchange theory could be used to explain all the others.

The second implication to a theory of mate selection is related to the attempt by some researchers to determine the stages of mate selection. The propositions collected here suggest the following stages (building upon the work

of Katz and Hill (1958), Kerckhoff and Bean (1967), and Murstein (1970)):

Stage I. Initial Interaction--the probability of interaction is a time-cost function.

Stage II. Socio-cultural homogamy--(also explained by a reward/cost function) similarity with respect to socio-cultural characteristics (race, religion, class, etc.).

Stage III. Value and personality homogamy--a reward/cost function.

Stage IV. Role compatability--again a reward/cost function.

As Murstein (1970) suggests, each stage supplies a filtering action that screens out the members of the field of eligibles. Fewer and fewer persons make it through each successive filter. However, it also appears logical that there is some interaction between the stages. Norms, both social and personal, are assumed to be used as selective and evaluative criteria at all levels according to the reward/cost function of the individual doing the selecting. Finally, it is possible that further research into a stage theory of mate selection may produce a larger number of stages with finer distinctions between the stages.

Conclusion

This attempt at a propositional formulation in the area of mate selection is obviously just a beginning. More

propositions were excluded from the formulation than were included, for reasons of brevity and clarity. But even this brief attempt exposes many possibilities for research that may not be readily apparent without the use of such a formulation. Several new propositions (hypotheses) were generated as the formulation developed; others will no doubt present themselves to the discerning reader.

Besides generating research hypotheses, such a propositional treatment of a research area consolidates the findings of myriad researchers into a less than overwhelming package. It is hoped that this seemingly trivial function will eliminate the accidental re-invention of the wheel that often occurs in the social sciences and channel new research efforts toward more fruitful areas. (This is not meant to belittle intentional replication which is seen as both necessary and extremely important.)

Finally, it appears that a stage theory of mate selection could have profound value to marriage counselors as well as researchers with its implications for questions such as:

> How stable is a marriage in which mate selection was completed after Stage II (or III), but before all stages were completed?
>
> How is a marriage affected if too much emphasis was placed upon the variables of one stage and not enough

emphasis was placed upon another (or if either stage II or III were bypassed and never completed)?

At which stage of mate selection do teenage pregnancies occur and what affect does this have upon the subsequent decisions of the teenagers?

The list of research questions could continue, limited only by the imagination of the author. Further research into and refinement of a stage theory of mate selection would be invaluable in answering these and other questions.

References

Bowerman, C. E. & Day, B. R.
1956 A test of the theory of complimentary needs as applied to couples during courtship. American Sociological Review, 21, 602-605.

Burchinal, L. G.
1960 Membership groups and attitudes toward cross-religious dating and marriage. Marriage and Family Living, 22, 248-253.

Burr, W. R.
1973 Theory Construction and the Sociology of the Family. John Wiley and Sons, New York.

Coombs, R. H.
1962 Reinforcement of values in the parental home as a factor in mate selection. Marriage and Family Living, 24, 155-157.

Edwards, J.
1969 Familial behavior as social exchange. Journal of Marriage and the Family, 32, 518-528.

Katz, A. M. & Hill, R.
1958 Residential propinquity and marital selection: a review of theory, method and fact. Marriage and Family Living (February), 27-35.

Kerckhoff, A. C.
1964 Patterns of homogamy and the field of eligibles. Social Forces, 42, 289-297.

Kerckhoff, A. C. & Bean, F. D.
1967 Role related factors in person perception among engaged couples. Sociometry, 30, 176-186.

Kerckhoff, A. C. & Davis, K. E.
1962 Value consensus and need complementarity in male selection. American Sociological Review, 27, 295-303.

Leslie, G. R. & Richardson, A. H.
1956 Family versus campus influences in relation to mate selection. Social Problems, 4, 117-121.

MacDonald, A. P., Jr.
1967 Birth order effects in marriage and parenthood: affiliation and socialization. Journal of Marriage and the Family, 29, 656-661.

Murstein, B. I.
1967 Empirical tests of role, complimentary needs, and homogamy theories of marital choice. Journal of Marriage and the Family, 29, 689-696.

Murstein, B. I.
1972 Person perception and courtship progress among premarital couples. Journal of Marriage and the Family, 34, 621-626.

Murstein, B. I.
1967 The relationship of mental health to marital choice and courtship progress. Journal of Marriage and the Family, 29, 447-451.

Murstein, B. I.
1970 Stimulus-value-role: a theory of marital choice. Journal of Marriage and the Family, 32, 465-481.

Selfors, S. A.; Leik, R. K.; & King. E.
1962 Values in mate selection: education versus religion. Marriage and Family Living, 24, 399-401.

Snyder, E. C.
1966 Marital selectivity in self-adju-tment, social adjustment and I.Q. Journal of Marriage and the Family, 28, 188-189.

Thomas, J. L.
1951 The factor of religion in the selection of marriage mates. American Sociological Review, 16, 487-491.

Trost, J.
1967 Some data on mate-selection: homogamy and perceived homogamy. Journal of Marriage and the Family, 29, 739-755.

Trost, J.
1967 Some data on mate selection: complementarity. Journal of Marriage and the Family, 29, 730-738.

Udry, J. R.
1963 Complementarity in mate selection: a perceptual approach. Marriage and Family Living, 25, 281-288.

Udry, J. R.
1967 Personality match and interpersonal perception as predictors of marriage. Journal of Marriage and the Family, 29, 722-725.

Ward, C. D.; Castro, M. A.; & Wilcox, A. H.
1974 Birth-order effects in a survey of mate selection and parenthood. The Journal of Social Psychology, 94, 57-64.

Winch, R. F.; Ktsanses, T.; & Ktsanses, V.
1974 The theory of complimentary needs in mate selection: an analytic and descriptive study. American Sociological Review, 19, 241-249.